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LAND OF THE FREE

Feb. 16th 1939.

To Ellis Parker,
with best Wishes,
Fred W. Johnson.

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Bounty land warrant issued to Abraham Lincoln

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LAND OF THE FREE

UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Harold L. Ickes, *Secretary*

GENERAL LAND OFFICE

Fred W. Johnson

Commissioner

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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Harold L. Ickes, *Secretary*
Harry Slattery, *Under Secretary*
Ebert K. Burlew, *First Assistant Secretary*
Oscar L. Chapman, *Assistant Secretary*

GENERAL LAND OFFICE

Fred W. Johnson, *Commissioner*
Antoinette Funk, *Assistant Commissioner*

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Hon. Harold L. Ickes,
Secretary of the Interior,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Progress of land development in a mighty Nation through more than 150 years of its history, is recorded in the official map of the United States, prepared by the General Land Office, Department of the Interior.

Ordered by act of Congress, in accordance with the program for issuance of an up-to-date chart of the Nation's territory every 2 years, the 1938 edition of the map, 7 feet long and 5 feet high, required many months of painstaking work by expert cartographers and engravers before it could be assembled in final form.

First issued in 1882 by a photolithographic process, the map today is produced from more than 20 large copper plates, upon which its minute details were transferred backwards by hand engraving from key charts in the General Land Office.

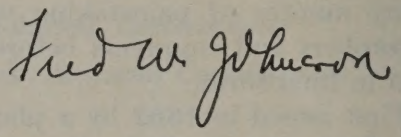
With its vari-colored sections showing Federal reservations, as well as many other topographic features in both continental United States and the Territories, the publication traces the westward course of an empire unique in world history—the expansion of a vast territory through amicable purchases, cessions, and accessions of land rather than by might of conquest.

Today, that Territory includes more than 750,000,000 acres of public domain brought under a program for preservation of the natural resources in the area for the benefit of all the people.

Preparation of the official map of the United States is only one of the manifold, complex tasks performed by the General Land Office, which since 1812 has served as the Government's agent in land negotiations under provisions of more than 5,000 laws passed by Congress for the supervision of vast tracts of public domain.

In connection with the issuance of the official map of the United States, there is submitted a brief historical review of land development in the United States, in response to increasing public demand for authentic information concerning the General Land Office and the public domain.

Very respectfully,



Commissioner, General Land Office.

The Beginning of a Nation

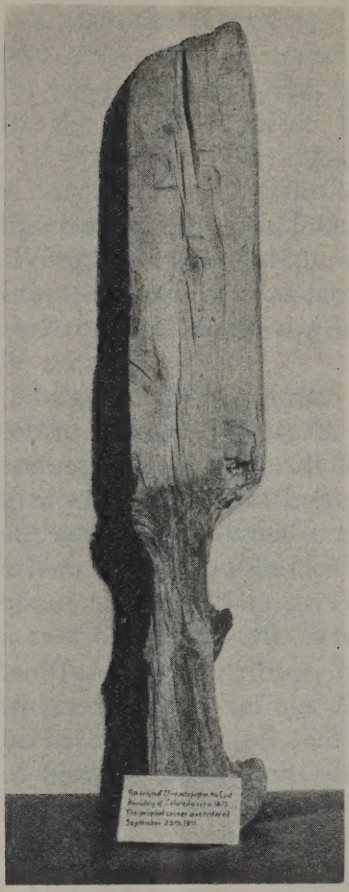
Surveys

Registering the advancement of America through many generations, the story of the official map finds its inception in earliest colonial days, when new methods of land surveying were introduced in the New World.

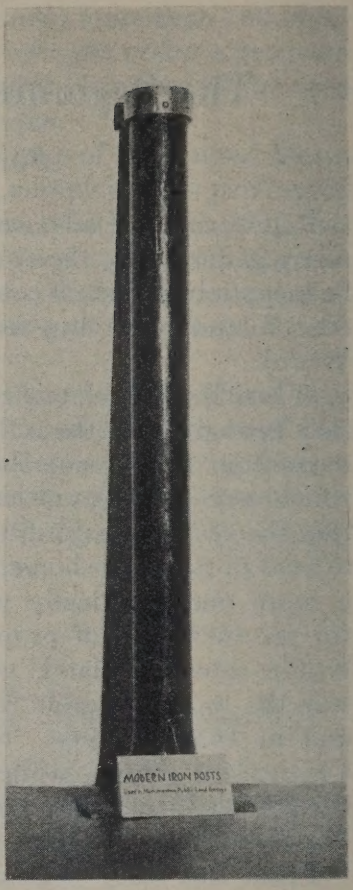
When the colonists first came to New England, they brought with them the European method of determining land ownership through measurements which were irregular in size and form. Recognizing that the system was ill-fitted to handle the vast scope of land in their new home, they early set out to devise a more mathematically precise and scientific mode for the surveying of property. It was found that a 6-mile square of land, with uniformity of outline, was the most desirable unit for land measurement, and in 1652 the first "town" was incorporated in Chelmsford, Mass., while the first grant of land in the form of 6 miles to the side became the town of Marlborough in the same State in 1656.

From this early beginning, the "rectangular system of survey" was put into operation when Congress, in 1785, adopted the plan for dividing the public domain into townships and sections, the measurements running from established principal meridian and base lines.

Early records reveal that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and other familiar figures in colonial history played prominent parts in steering the program through the forceful and bitter debates



The original 73d mile post on the East boundary of Colorado, set in 1872.



Modern iron posts used in monumenting public land surveys by the General Land Office.

in the Continental Congress, while the first memorandum recommending adoption of the plan was prepared in Jefferson's handwriting.

With passage of the law in 1785, the first principal meridian—an arbitrary north and south line from which the lot and township measurements were computed—was established on the boundary between Pennsylvania and Ohio, and lands designated for the benefit of Revolutionary soldiers were marked off under the direction of Rufus Putman who had been appointed by President Washington to the newly created office of Surveyor General of the United States.

From that point, the westward course of the Nation proceeded, with the appointment by President Jefferson of Jared Mansfield as Surveyor General of the United States in 1803; a move which led to the designation of other principal meridian lines upon which the land measurements of today are based.

Today, the rectangular system of surveying in the United States, perfected through the years of operation, stands as a world model for efficiency and precision in the designation of land tract boundaries insuring accuracy in the determination of rightful ownership to millions of parcels of property.

Taking over the Federal land negotiation with its establishment in 1812, the General Land Office for more than 125 years has kept careful account of the Government's real estate transactions. Through its operations, the territorial expansion of the United States is recorded in 6,000 volumes of field notes describing early survey activities; the recurrent transfer of property is noted in 41,000 tract books in its files, and the transfer of vast areas of public domain to private or State ownership is attested through the issuance of more than 4,000,000 patents.

Whose land is it? Whenever this question is asked anywhere in the United States, the answer is found in the 2½ miles of books, like these, in the files of the General Land Office in Washington, priceless records of original land transactions.

Major factor in the land development of the Nation, its activities during earlier land-rush days led to the coining of a phrase—"doing a land-office business"—which still serves in popular imagination to describe any overwhelming volume of work.

What the Public Domain Is

The public domain, usually styled "public lands," embraces territory acquired by the Government of the United States by treaty, cession by States, or purchase, lying in certain States and the Territory of Alaska.

At its greatest extent—aggregating 1,820,366,080 acres—it included Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi and all the States north and west of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, except Texas; in other words, all the States and Alaska except the Thirteen Original States, and the States of Kentucky, Maine, Vermont, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Texas.

At the present time, the public domain areas consist of 404,132,800 acres in continental United States, and 346,174,242 acres in Alaska.

There still remains about 127,000,000 acres of land in the continental area, and 376,000,000 acres in Alaska, which have not yet been surveyed.

Origin of the Public Domain

At the close of the Revolutionary War, and upon ratification of the Constitution, several of the States owned large tracts of unoccupied lands extending westward to the Mississippi River, which they had secured under grants from Great Britain while still colonies of that Government.

The States which held no western land contended

that the unoccupied areas should be held by all the States as common property for the benefit of the Nation. In response to this suggestion, these unoccupied lands were ceded to the Federal Government at various times from 1781 to 1802 by the States which owned them—New York, Virginia, Massachusetts, Connecticut, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Constituting the first area of the public domain, these cessions involved two large tracts, containing approximately 266,427,520 acres, embraced within the present States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Tennessee, that part of Minnesota lying east of the Mississippi River, and all of Alabama and Mississippi lying north of the thirty-first parallel of latitude.

Additions to the Public Domain

Then began a steady advance westward until, by 1867, at a cost of only approximately $82,000,000, other vast tracts of public land on the continent and Alaska had been incorporated into the structure now depicted on the map of the United States.

On April 30, 1803, practically the entire western drainage basin of the Mississippi River was purchased from France for $27,267,621.98. Thus, for a cost of about 5$\frac{1}{7}$ cents per acre, an area containing 529,911,680 acres was added to public domain which later became all of the States of Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota, and embraced parts of the States of Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico.

What is now the State of Florida was purchased

from Spain for $6,489,768—about 17 1/10 cents per acre—as a result of the treaty of February 22, 1819.

The explorations of Lewis and Clark in the Northwest in 1804–06, and later occupation by Americans, established the claim of the United States to 183,386,240 acres of territory embracing the present States of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, and parts of Montana and Wyoming. A treaty with Great Britain in 1846 defined the northern boundary of the territory.

The cession from Mexico by Treaty of Guadaloupe Hidalgo, February 2, 1848, gave the United States what is now the States of California, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Arizona, and New Mexico. In these negotiations, 338,680,960 acres of land were acquired for $15,000,000—about 4 1/2 cents per acre.

When Texas voted to join the United States, she retained control of her public lands. On September 9, 1850, the United States purchased from Texas her claim to 78,892,800 acres, west and north of her present boundaries, for $16,000,000. This area, including lands now in Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico, cost about 20 1/4 cents per acre.

Other portions of Arizona and New Mexico were acquired through purchase from Mexico of 18,988,800 acres of land to rectify the southern boundary of the United States. Consummated in the "Gadsden Purchase" on December 30, 1853, the tract cost the United States only $10,000,000, or about 52 cents per acre.

The last great addition to the public domain was made on March 3, 1867, when 378,165,760 acres of territory in Alaska were purchased from Russia for $7,200,000—1 9/10 of a cent per acre.

Free land! In 1889, land in the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), was opened to settlement. Typical tented cities of these early land rush days are depicted by diorama in the Museum of the Department of the Interior, Washington, showing land office at Guthrie.

The Growth of a Nation

The expansion of the United States over the vast tracts of public domain thus acquired formed a prominent part of the national life for many generations. Pushing the borders of civilization ever farther westward, towns and villages were established, railroads, canals, and wagon roads extended, and vast areas of valuable agricultural land opened to settlement—a mighty empire was in the making.

Shifts in the national land picture, recorded on the official map, were accompanied by equally interesting changes in national policies with respect to land disposal activities. Prompted by popular sentiment, made effective through congressional enactments and carried out by the General Land Office, land development in the United States passed through four distinct cycles of operation.

The first of these, put into effect shortly after the close of the Revolutionary War, contemplated the sales of the land for cash; the second period was characterized by pioneering and home building. Later came the era of reservation and conservation of the land resources of the Nation, and then was ushered in the program for the cooperative use of material resources and the reservation and protection of areas having scenic, historic, scientific, and recreational interest.

Cash and Credit Sales

During the first period, the public lands were used as a source of revenue with which to pay the expenses of the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Mexican

War, and to support and maintain governmental institutions.

Lands were sold at public auction to the highest bidder for cash, or were opened to private purchase at a fixed price, and nearly 200,000,000 acres were disposed of under the various cash sales.

Under this same program, more than 60,000,000 acres of land were disposed of by military bounty land warrants, which granted tracts of territory in varying sizes for military services rendered before March 3, 1855.

It is interesting to note that a bounty land warrant was issued to Abraham Lincoln for service in the Black Hawk Indian War, and other figures familiar in American history were offered like rewards for their military services.

Pioneering and Homesteading

This era of land disposition was terminated in 1863, when the first homesteading law, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, became effective.

The sweep of settlement and development of the land from Ohio westward to the Pacific was largely the result of this new "free land" policy on the public domain. Laying the foundation for the great material wealth and individual prosperity of the Nation, about 275,000,000 acres were transferred to settlers, a greater area than has been disposed of under any other public land law.

With amendments of the law from time to time enlarging the acreage allowed each homesteader, and decreasing the period of residence required, by 1916 he was allowed 640 acres of land and need live on it only 7 months in each of 3 years before obtaining title.

While the system of issuing military bounty land warrants was discontinued prior to the Civil War, soldiers still are given special consideration in the disposal of the public domain. In 1872, laws were enacted permitting Civil War veterans to receive credit for their period of service in determining the time required for residence in perfecting a homestead entry, and this privilege was extended to veterans of other wars, including the World War.

In 1903, when the War with Spain and the Philippine Insurrection were at an end, there were 495,306,529 acres of public domain reported as unreserved and unappropriated, while the returning World War veterans found that early in 1921 there were over 200,000,000 acres of unreserved public land remaining.

Indian Lands

As white settlements pushed westward, treaties were made with the Indians under the terms of which their lands were ceded to the Federal Government. These treaties frequently made provisions for the reservation of other areas for the use and benefit of the Indians and from time to time public lands were set apart by act of Congress or Executive order as Indian reservations.

The most important group of reservations in the mid-nineteenth century was located in Indian Territory, now Oklahoma.

As the Indian population diminished, it became apparent that this area contained thousands of acres more than the Indians needed for their subsistence, and, beginning in 1889, portions of the Indian Territory were opened to white settlement.

Spectacular scenes where tent cities sprang up overnight were common in the early days, when large areas of Indian lands were opened to homestead settlement under the supervision of the General Land Office.

Use and Development of Public Lands

The principle of use and development found in the homestead law has been carried into many other public land laws since enacted. The desert land act, the reclamation law, and the mining law of 1872 are notable instances.

About 10,000,000 acres of desert and semidesert lands in Western States, useless without irrigation, have been disposed of under the desert land laws.

During the period of development, along with the enactment of laws applying directly to individuals, a series of laws was put into the statutes by which great areas of public lands were disposed of in the form of grants to States and railroads.

Considerable areas of swamp lands went to certain States under the swamp land laws.

Railroad, canal, and wagon road grants were made to afford settlers in the newly opened public lands outlets to markets or means of communication with the people of the East.

Out of the wilderness which constituted the public domain of 150 years ago has been developed one of the richest agricultural areas in the world. Today, the greater part of the agricultural wealth of the Nation lies within the public land States. Eighty-nine percent of the wheat grown in this country, 82 percent of the corn, 98 percent of the citrus fruits, and 46 percent of the cotton are grown in the public land States.

In addition, the growth and industrial development within this area has been phenomenal. Today there are 21 cities in the public land States with a population of more than a quarter of a million. Of these only New Orleans and St. Louis were sizeable settlements a century and a half ago. Many of our largest industries are found within this region.

Land for Education

As a natural outgrowth of the theory of development of our natural resources, Congress early began to make liberal donations of the public lands for the support of common schools.

Extensive grants of lands were given to each new State as it entered the Union, affording the States large permanent school funds. The foundation of the agricultural and mechanical colleges, supported in part from the sale or lease of public lands, was laid in these grants, and today one out of every five college students in the United States attends a land grant school.

Reservation and Conservation

The conservation and reservation theory of public land administration was a gradual evolution brought about when the end of land and resources that the pioneer could develop unaided was foreseen.

The Reclamation Act of 1902 was enacted as a part of this new conservation theory. It provided for the construction of reservoirs and water-supply ditches to irrigate arid lands where the problem of water supply was too big for private interests to solve.

Other expressions of the conservation theory are found in the reservation of large areas of public lands

as forest reserves, extensive classification, and withdrawals of lands on account of nonmetalliferous minerals such as coal, oil, phosphate, and sodium; enactment of the mineral leasing acts for the control and disposition of such minerals, and withdrawals of lands for national park purposes and for wildlife and game refuges.

The Future of a Nation

In the early 1900's, a Nation which had extended its borders from the Atlantic to the Pacific paused to consider the future. Looking back upon an era which witnessed the greatest movement in land development in modern history, it found the time had come to take stock of its vast storehouses of natural resources, in order to insure protection of its assets of land, minerals, and forests, for the benefit of generations yet to come. At the same time, it was recognized that continued prosperity in the United States called for prudent use, rather than complete withdrawal from development, of these resources.

This beneficial program, known as "conservation," has been brought to a high state of advancement under the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

Passage by Congress of the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, and the subsequent issuance of Executive orders, withdrawing the public lands from entry, paved the way for efficient operation of this program.

The Public Lands Today

Under the new program, the administration of the public domain has undergone a very decided change.

Westward, Government surveyors trace the course of an empire. Measurement of Pinnacle Rock, California, type of hazardous work performed by General Land Office engineers.

Today, conservation rather than disposal is the dominant note in activities of the General Land Office, and, with some exceptions, the public lands may now be disposed of only after appropriate classification.

In other words, the indiscriminate allocation of tracts of public domain is no longer made; on the contrary, the Secretary of the Interior must decide that the land applied for is suitable for the use to which it is proposed to be put, before the allocation is made.

Moreover, while formerly the public lands were open range, subject to unrestricted grazing use, more than 120,000,000 acres of such land now have been included within grazing districts, for use under leases or licenses designed to prevent overgrazing of the lands and consequent deterioration of the soil.

Other portions of the public domain remain open to entry under the homestead, desert land, and timber, and stone laws, but the Secretary of the Interior first

must determine if, as, and when such lands may be classified as properly suitable for such entry and use.

Contrary to the popular impression that the major work of the General Land Office was completed with the initial settlement of the original public domain tracts, it occupies a key position in the present-day conservation program through its surveys, studies, and administrative activities in classifying the lands and carrying on the other complex details of the Government's real estate business.

Mineral Resources

Equally important with its land conservation activities is the work of the General Land Office in administering the public domain to insure proper development of the oil and gas resources of the Nation. Here, again, prudent conservation policies have been put into effect to prevent waste, on the one hand, and bring about an adequate return to the Government of its share of the production obtained, on the other.

Fundamental changes in the method for handling the development of oil and gas on the public domain, enacted by Congress in 1935, imposed upon the General Land Office the tremendous and technically intricate task of transforming more than 8,000 original miners' prospecting permits into leases now required under the new system, as well as responsibility for issuance of prospecting leases on new applications filed since the passage of the act.

Protection of valuable forest resources in the Northwest is another important feature in the work of the General Land Office in carrying forward the administration's program for conservation.

In Alaska, the first Government auction of public land, at Anchorage July 1915, brought bids of $825 for the first lot.

In the earlier land-grant days, Congress allocated large tracts of land in Oregon for railroad and wagon road construction. Later, these lands were ordered returned to Federal ownership, and in 1937, a law was passed placing these 2,500,000 acres of valuable forest territory under the jurisdiction of the General Land Office, for development under a plan which would both insure a sustained yield of timber for the benefit of future generations and protect the valuable resources from waste and destruction by fire.

Today, in addition to its outstanding record as real-estate agent for the Government for over 125 years, the General Land Office stands as one of the few Federal agencies whose operations are conducted at a profit to the taxpayer. Returning to the Federal Treasury $5 for every $1 spent, receipts during 1937 totaled $7,588,020, as compared with $1,614,988 in expenditures.

The Public Domain at a Glance

Scope of the land-development program in the Nation over its 150 years of history is shown by the following:

Title Passed From the United States

	Acres
Homesteads (approximate)	280, 727, 224
Military land warrants (approximate)	61, 000, 000
Cash sales and miscellaneous disposals (approximate)	357, 818, 535
Grants to railroad corporations	94, 234, 584
Grants to States	230, 174, 418
Total area disposed of	1, 023, 954, 761

Today, the land picture of the Nation, as shown on the official map, is:

Title Remaining in the United States

	Acres
National forests	140, 163, 233
National parks and monuments	8, 735, 303
Indian lands and reservations, estimated	57, 518, 590
Military, naval, miscellaneous reservations, estimated	1, 000, 000
Withdrawn for nongrazing purposes	26, 566, 000
Grazing districts and unappropriated	174, 707, 333
Total	408, 690, 459

Public Domain in Alaska

	Acres
Total area of Alaska	378, 165, 760
Of which there has been surveyed	2, 106, 835
Leaving unsurveyed	376, 058, 925
Vacant, unappropriated and unreserved public land	346, 174, 242
Reserved land in Alaska includes:	
Mount McKinley National Park	1, 939, 493
Glacier Bay National Park	1, 164, 800
Katmai National Monument	2, 697, 590

In addition there are 21,346,221 acres set aside in national forests in Alaska.

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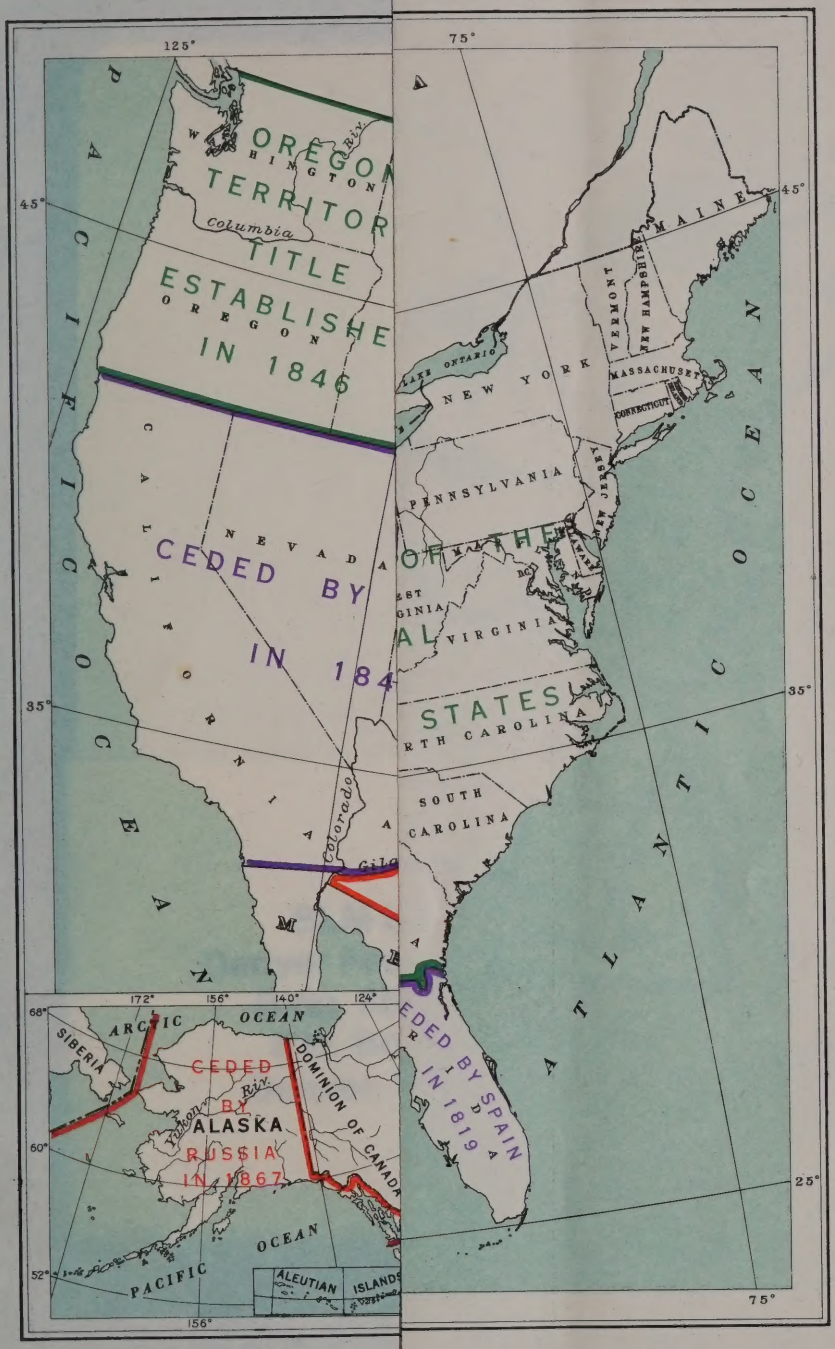
125°
75°
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OREGON TERRITOR
TITLE ESTABLISHE
IN 1846
CEDED BY
IN 184
STATES
OF THE
AL
PACIFIC OCEAN
ATLANTIC OCEAN
NEW YORK
PENNSYLVANIA
VIRGINIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
MAINE
VERMONT
NEW HAMPSHIRE
MASSACHUSETTS
CONNECTICUT
NEW JERSEY
LAKE ONTARIO
Columbia
Colorado
CEDED BY SPAIN IN 1819
172°
156°
140°
124°
68°
60°
52°
ARCTIC OCEAN
SIBERIA
CEDED BY RUSSIA IN 1867
ALASKA
DOMINION OF CANADA
PACIFIC OCEAN
ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

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MAP SHOWING THE ACQUISITION OF THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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